

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 2

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A "Citizens Group's" Hot Plot: CIA-FBI Foreknowledge of Letelier Bombing

by Kirk Kildwell

"A citizen's group has learned—after a two-year investigation—that former officers and agents of the Central Intelligence Agency were accessories both before and after the fact in the Letelier-Moffitt murders."

This report was part of a mailgram sent to members of the Washington press corps inviting them to a press conference on June 25, 1980 at the United Methodist Building in Washington, D.C. The mailgram from Donald Freed of Los Angeles promised that evidence would be presented that would show that both the FBI and CIA had foreknowledge of the murder plot against Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean cabinet minister in the Marxist Allende government. Letelier was killed in Washington, D.C. in September 1976.

Nothing was said at the press conference that provided any credible evidence that either the CIA or the FBI were accessories to the murder of Orlando Letelier. Donald Freed, the leader of the group that called the press conference promised that a *Newsday* reporter, John Cummings, would charge that the FBI and the CIA both had advance knowledge of the plot on Letelier and that a former U.S. attorney "knew where the orders came from." Mr. Cummings failed to live up to that billing.

Another member of the group, Fred Landis, focused on the charge that Letelier's killer, Michael Townley, was under the control of a Chilean named Rafael Otero Echeverria. He claimed that Otero had worked for the CIA during the Allende years in Chile, but offered no proof. Nor did he submit any proof that Otero was a control for Michael Townley or that Otero had any CIA connection at the time of the Letelier assassination.

A fourth member of the group, Dr. William F. Pepper, complained that the FBI and CIA had refused to make their files on Townley available to the group. Pepper, who was the originator of a discredited 1967 charge that the United States had been responsible for killing or wounding a million children in Vietnam, also charged that the greatest threat to freedom of the press in this country today

is that "the people, the masses, are digesting slanted, interpreted accounts—often written in the halls of intelligence—of very critical events." Pepper provided no evidence to back up that charge.

The only excitement at this overly hyped press conference came when Reed Irvine, editor of the AIM Report, asked the members of the group if they agreed with CIA defector Philip Agee's statement that the KGB was doing good things because they were on the right side. Did they approve of covert operations when carried out by the KGB or the Cuban DGI and disapprove when they were carried out by the CIA?

Landis made a lengthy speech in reply in which he said that the CIA uses the KGB and the communists as scapegoats. Irvine said that Landis had not answered his question and insisted that he and the

other members of the group answer it. Donald Freed, who several years ago had beat a charge that he had sold grenades to a Black Panther with the defense that he had been the victim of an agent provocateur, accused Irvine of causing a "provocation." When one of the members of the group said he was willing to answer the question the following dialogue ensued.

Freed: I want you to see how provocation is—let me handle this.

Irvine: The question has not been answered and I demand an answer.

Freed: Watch me and see how provocation is handled. Listen to me carefully under his shouting. This is an agent provocateur, and I want you to watch carefully his mode of operation.

Member of audience: Who are you?

Irvine: I am Reed Irvine, editor of the AIM Report.

Freed: Watch him carefully. The AIM Report is one of the groups that spreads stories that the Letelier murder was a leftwing plot.

Irvine: That is not true.

Freed: This gentleman works with David Atlee Phillips.